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Cc: []

From: CN=Hanady Kader/OU=R10/O=USEPA/C=US

Sent: Thur 7/19/2012 7:25:34 PM

Subject: Audubon Magazine: Alaskan Salmon in Bristol Bay Threatened by Potential Mine

[Alaskan Salmon in Bristol Bay Threatened by Potential Mine](#)
[Alaska Dispatch covered the Frontline promos that are running](#)
[report](#)

[Nunamta Aulukestai](#)

[Trout Unlimited](#)

[Audubon Alaska](#)

[statement](#)

[here](#)

Audobon Magazine ran this post on its blog this morning:

[Alaskan Salmon in Bristol Bay Threatened by Potential Mine](#)

Also, the Alaska Dispatch covered the Frontline promos that are running. Alisha, let me know if you have a chance to talk about how we want to handle media inquiries stemming from that documentary. I imagine we might get some on Wednesday morning.

[Alaskan Salmon in Bristol Bay Threatened by Potential Mine](#)

Time is running out to weigh in on this important issue.

By Susan Cosier

Published: 07/19/2012

Along Alaska's southwestern coast lies Bristol Bay, the most productive sockeye salmon habitat in the world. Beneath the surface of the area around the bay is the Pebble deposit, an undisturbed supply of gold and copper that a number of companies want to mine. But a large-scale mining operation there—in particular its toxin-filled tailing ponds—could irreparably harm the watershed, according to an EPA report produced at the request of several concerned native tribes and released in May. The report, open to public comment until July 23, could prompt the Obama administration to preempt any permit applications to dig on the land, which is owned by the state.

"The assessment really shines light on the fact that large-scale mining and the footprint itself is going to damage salmon habitat," says Kimberly Williams, executive director of Nunamta Aulukestai ("Caretakers of Our Land"), an association of Bristol Bay native village corporations, tribes, and the Bristol Bay regional corporation. "That risk is way too large."

Native people have fished there sustainably for 4,000 years. The region provides approximately 46 percent of world's supply of wild sockeye salmon. The watershed is home to all five salmon species, and the rich ecosystem also supports caribou and more than 190 kinds of birds, including internationally significant populations of king and Steller's eiders, emperor geese, bar-tailed godwits, and other waterbirds that use the rich waters and mudflats of Bristol Bay and in some cases breed in the lowlands.

"This is an incredibly important American landscape, whether it's on state land or not," says Trout Unlimited's Alaska program director Tim Bristol. "This is not the place to dig a big hole in the ground, at the headwaters of our largest remaining salmon fishery." Although no companies have submitted formal plans to mine there, Britain's Anglo American and Canada's Northern Dynasty Minerals joined to form the Pebble Limited Partnership in 2007 and hope to develop what could be the largest open-pit copper mine in the world. The group has indicated that as early as this year it will apply for a permit to start mining operations.

In applying for a 2006 water-withdrawal permit, Northern Dynasty Minerals submitted hundreds of pages of information, including details about a future mine proposal. The EPA used that scenario to help assess the potential damage to Bristol Bay. The mine claim could be as large as 186 square miles, about the size of 90,000 football fields, and 20 times bigger than all of Alaska's other mines combined. Dams would contain tailing ponds, where toxic waste and chemicals, including copper, would accumulate. A dam collapse and leaching ponds could devastate the fishery, the report states. Pipeline, road, and culvert failures are also potential problems.

Not only would the fishery be affected, but the surrounding ecosystem could also suffer. Salmon from the Pacific Ocean bring nutrients into the watershed and feed both aquatic and terrestrial plants and wildlife. Bristol Bay has seen very little development, so it is largely intact—making it a place that brown bears, bald eagles, gray wolves, moose, caribou, and numerous waterbirds depend on. "That's a giant system," says Nils Warnock, executive director of Audubon Alaska. "You can't just separate [the salmon] out and expect no other consequences to the food chain. Their nutrients are assimilated into the whole watershed. They literally become part of the trees and the plants." Those headwaters nourish and feed the area's bird populations, he adds. "There's a risk of a potentially significant effect—that's certainly safe to say."

So far most of the public response to the draft has been in favor of preserving the natural area.

Attendance at public meetings has been high; at some meetings, support for the report's findings has been as high as 80 percent. The mining industry, on the other hand, has criticized the report, which it says was rushed and incomplete.

"We believe it would be unprecedented and entirely inappropriate for the EPA to take steps to stop our project before it has been fully designed, before we have presented an environmental mitigation strategy designed to protect the fish and water resources of the area, before we have completed an economic benefits study, and before we have submitted a permit application and started the rigorous permitting process," said Pebble Partnership president John Shively in a statement.

At the beginning of August, an independent scientific panel including biologists, hydrologists, mining experts, and seismologists will review the assessment for its scientific and technical merit. Supporters of the draft, including native groups, environmental organizations, and sports fishermen, then want the EPA to block the development of a mine under enforcement of the Clean Water Act. "People in Bristol Bay understand what a major catastrophic event can do to their industry," says Kimberly Williams.

[Click here to comment on the EPA's assessment and to express your interest in keeping Bristol Bay pristine.](#)

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